A LETTER TO A PERSON of HONOUR:

WRITTEN

By

Mr. THOMAS WHITE,

In Vindication of Himself and his Doctrine.

MDCLIX.

TO THE READER.

THough I confeſs *our Nation is eaſily affected* with *the* modes *of* France, *yet by no means* would I have *thee miſtake this Paper for* an Engliſh PROVINCIAL LETTER, *ſuch keen-edg'd tools may poſſibly hereafter come in faſhion even among us too, and for my part I never ſhall blame the ſharpneſs of the* knife, *if the* branch *is cuts off be* fruitleſs *and the*

ſeaſon fit. *But here I would have thee expect a milder, yet manly proceeding. A perſon who knows himſelf clearly innocent, whom his Friends and acquaintance know highly deſerving, whom all the world knows eminently learned, a perſon whoſe writings every unenvious Reader admires, and every judicious approver incomparably eſteems, finding himſelf, by glad experience in the perusal of his works, grow ſtill more ſolidly and underſtandingly vertuous: This perſon, moſt injuriouſly* accuſ'd *(and as yet no more then accuſ'd) after a long patience, comes now abroad, ſeriouſly to demand a proof of their* Charge. *If they* convince, *he promiſes* ſatisfaction; *if not, he expects it from them. A long while they have rail'd againſt him, and every*

day

day their clamours still grow lowder, especially, since his removal to a further distance hath left them free to their *own full cry. At last the* noise *has* wak'd *again this little child of his, that else might have still* slept *quietly in its private closet. It had indeed before been particularly shown to divers of of the* opposers, *modestly inviting their courage to encounter it; but its unhappiness is, that none as yet appears to justifie their calumny, and yet they still go on to calumniate. It therefore now resolves to come forth in publick, and earnestly conjure every one into this justice, that they neither raise themselves any ungrounded scandal, nor give regard to such as shall be raised by others, till this so just, so necessary, a* Challenge *be fairly and rationally*

answer'd; *desiring them in the mean while to rest securely on this safe Dilemma: Either his Adversaries can maintain their accusation, and then they are uncharitable not to do't; or they cannot, and then they are uncharitable to accuse. From both which, that thou maist be free; is the endeavour of this paper, and*

Thy faithful Servant

T. K.

HONOURED SIR,

WHilst my Adversaries were content to whisper up and down their grave, but empty, censures of me, amongst confiding, and credulously zealous devotes (their proper Auditory) or, at most, amongst unlearned men, whose busie commerce, though it direct them now and then to a large and indulgent Casuist, yet doth it afford them little leasure to consult with true Divinity; I contented my self likewise to leave them to the applause of such admirers, looking upon it as lost time to prepare any Apology. But their confidence being now raisd to that height as to presume to pour their Calum-

nies into your ears whom God hath bleſt with a judgment ſingularly capable to diſcern truth, and an authority fit to bear ſway amongſt prudent perſons; I can no longer decline the task, but humbly offer what I conceive may ſuffice to juſtifie me in your candid thoughts. If this ſhort diſcourſe ſerve to diſpel the miſt which hath lately been caſt before your eyes, I ſhall rejoyce for both our ſakes; if otherwiſe, for my own; hoping your charity will make me ſee my failings, and acknowledg them.

In the firſt place, my *Doctrine* is accuſed of *Hereſie*, nor is my *perſon* more favorably treated; but we have heard of old, that it were impoſſible in the world to be innocent, if it were all one to be accuſed and to be guilty; That nature hath furniſhed us with an eare for the defendant, as well as plaintif. This Juſtice then I beg of ſuch as are competent judges in ſo great a cauſe; for, in truth, it belongeth to the ſupremeſt courts

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of Theologie to censure dogmatical Tenets, which office notwithstanding, now-a-daies, the most ignorant amongst us are the most ready to usurp.

To this *Calumny* then I answer, That if any Doctrine of mine be found to contradict any authority constantly acknowledg'd for infallible in the Catholick Church, I am ready to disown, and renounce it; If this profession render not a man *Catholick*, or *Orthodox*, I should be glad to learn what doth. To speak more plainly, if we regard the testimonies of *Holy Scriptures*, or consent of *Fathers*, unless I abound therewith more then my opposers; if perusing the decrees of Councells, and Popes, we find therin any thing expresly repugnant to what I have taught; Lastly, if, in any one point, I have thwarted the universal *Practice of the Church*, let me be esteem'd to have lost the cause. But withall let me beg this favour, that where the clear Text condemns me not, the glos of

privat Expositors may not pronounce me guilty. I know no reason why any *Divine* should forfeit the right his degree and quality gives him of interpretation, because others of the same Profession dissent from him.

Secondly, The *Practice of the Church* is urged against me, and that with lowder noise, and greater confidence of victory. But let them reflect, how many such Ecclesiastical *Practices* have been layd aside, and obliterated. Who now a daies administers the *Eucharist* in Baptism to *Infants*? What is become of the *three* immersions? Where shall we see those so much anciently reverene'd solemnities during the whole Octaves of *Easter* and *Pentecost*? Is the sacred Host now received into our hands? Is it brought home; or carried about us in our travails? Are both the kinds or *species* given to the Laity in publick Festivities? Of all the *Penitential Canons* what else remaines but a faint shadow? Pray-

er for the *Saints* departed is long since lay'd aside. The decrees of the Apostolical Synod concerning blood and suffocated meats are no where observed. What alterations may we not find in the election of *Prelates*, and *Ecclesiastical* Courts? Finally, in our *Fasts* and *Vigils*? Did they throughly weigh all this, they would not so violently presume, and confidently proclaim the *Practise* of the *Church* to be an argument of *Faith*: They would perceive that these Practises are mutable, and consequently can yeeld no firme foundation of Doctrine.

But what is this to my particular case, who oppose, or controul no one modern *Ecclesiastical Practise*; for we are not to think whatever is generally done by all Christians must therefore immediatly become an Ecclesiasticall custome, no more then we are to conclude that an opinion, or truth, assented to by all individual Catholiks must needs become an

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Article of their Faith; For so the earth's standing still, and even *Columbus* his discovery of the new world might claim a place in their Creed. Such customes then alone are to be stiled *Ecclesiastical* as are grounded on *Ecclesiastical constitutions*, on the *Canon* Lawes, on the *Rituals*, or *Ceremonials* used by the whole Church, not on the Zeal, or fervor of the multitude: But of any of these we hear no mention: The very name of *Practise* imports *Customs* and *prescription*, and customs has the force of a law. But none that I know of, forgets himself so farr as to affirm that the Practice, whose denyal he obtrudes on me, induceth a necessity upon any one of putting it in execution. To conclude, they asperse not only mee, but the Church her self, which professeth these concessions to be *Priviledges*, that is, grants contrary to the general *Rule* or *Customs*. Our supream Pastors call them *Graces*, or *Indulgences* which

which my opposers either proclaim for customes, and Practises, or else speak nothing to the purpose. Thus whilst they seek to calumniate me, they unawars attaque the Church, esteeming nothing so sacred as the satisfaction of their precipitate passions.

Thirdly, Those, who are not altogether so fierce against me, will have my Doctrine not indeed *Heretical*, but yet neerly *ally'd to Heresie*: I conjure these men to tell me what it is to be *neer to Heresie*, and not to blast my reputation with specious, but insignificant censures. For, *Truths* and *falshoods* are indivisible, and not, like quantity, more or *less* approaching. Yea the sublimest Truths (if not all) are on each side closely confind with falsities. The mystery of the Sacred *Trinity* hath, on this, the precipice of the *Tritheist*, on that, of the *Sabellian Heresie*: you no sooner step out of the *Orthodox* limits of the *Incarnation*, but you are plunged in the prophane blasphemies of

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Entichus or *Nestorius*, Besides if to be *of Faith* signifies to be *revealed*, to be *almost* of Faith will signifie to be *almost* reveal'd, and to be *near Heresie* will import the contrary truth to have narrowly escaped *Revelation*, which for my part let him understand that can, I shall clear my self when I comprehend their accusation.

A fourth Engin, wherewith they labour to possess and prejudice weak capacities, is, that *Philosophical* controversies admit what latitude of liberty you please, but *Theological* ones not so. I cannot sufficiently admire their forgetfulness: Was there ever *Divine* whose very *Profession* ingaged him not in disputes of *Divinity*? Is there an university in the world wherein such questions are not treated? What else doe School-men propose to themselves but the discussing, and clearing against Infidels and Heretieks, the mysteries of our *Faith* by Principles of *Nature*, and *Philosophy*,

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and the illustrating that obscurity which overshadows them, by the light and conformity of *Reason*, to the unspeakable comfort of the Faithful? How then comes that to be unlawful for me which in all others is not only allow'd, but highly commended?

It were well (say they) provided you containd your self within the bounds of opinions generally receiv'd, and presum'd not to transgresse the dictates of more ancient School-men. I am at a loss again, do they conceive the Dictates of their so much magnifi'd Masters in Divinity infallible? If they are not, for as much as yet appeares, error may happen to be on both sides, since though truth can be but one, the mistakes of such as seek it may be manifold. But according to this Principle, though both sides go astray, yet must no charitable hand hang out a lanthorn to enlighten so noble a portion of the Church as is the School. Surely *Molina* had other thoughts when

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he glori'd in the first discovery of *Scientia media*, or Gods conditional foresight of our actions, boasting that St. *Augustin*, and all the rest of the ancient Fathers were ignorant thereof; which bold fancy of his, how eagerly it hath been since embrac'd (notwithstanding the brand of *Heresie* stigmatized thereon by the Fathers of St. *Dominick*) the yet fresh, and uncompos'd tumults of the School suffer us not to forget.

But they will have us at least to confess, that where ever the whole Authority of the School is engag'd in any one *Opinion*, it must of necessity be true and beyond all opposition. The same discourse returns again upon them. That Authority is either *fallible*, or *infallible*; if *fallible*, then cannot any multitude of Patrons whatsoever secure it from lyableness to error, and it will appear impiety to deny the Church a means of clearing her sight therein? If it be pretended *infallible*, I ask

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whence are we assur'd thereof? If by any other authority than their own, let us beg the favour to see it produc'd; if by their own only, we shall then submit when they shall have extricated themselves out of the maze, or circle, in which they dance. But, to proceed; by what means can we imagin this [illegible] multitude on a suddain immur'd with the prerogative of [illegible]certitude? *Philosophers*, besides that of *Faith*, acknowledg no other then such as springs from *Demonstration*; of which kind it hath not been my fortune to encounter any, when they offer at it, I shall most willingly listen. It is a received Maxim, that a Doctors Authority reaches no further than the force of the reason he brings, can carry it. If this be verify'd of each particular, how come they to deserve more collectively? Look upon their own assertions, do they not define that the Judgment of *three grave Divines* in any opinion begets a *probability*? Yet

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if I have any reason left me, these compar'd to many thousands no-thing prejudice the universality of the contrary part; Nay, many of them have thought and main-tain'd that the Judgment even of *one*, who hath throughly look'd into a difficult point, may be suf-ficient to establish a probability against the opposit multitude. What then have I or any other of-fended, if, after mature inspection, we have preferr'd the substance of *reason* before the shadow of *popularity*? Adde to this, the very boast of *universall* consent of Doctors is altogether vain, who hath examined the hundreth part of them? who can dive into the sentiments of such as have not written, whose number notwith-standing and authority is far grea-ter then theirs who covet to ap-pear in print? So that, if you scan the expression, under the notion of *all* Doctors, you will find to be understood a few only, who bear sway in the Universities; a handful, God knows, out of a plentiful Harvest. They

They rest not yet satisfy'd, but accuse me at least of *Indiscretion*, that, in a Kingdome averse, and separated from the Communion of the Cath. Church, I have printed a book or two, from which they conceive *Heretiсks* may take occasion to reproach us with intestine *dissentions* in *Religion*. Though I am not one who challenge the reputation of *Prudent*, or go about to cleer my self wholly from all lyableness to the oppolit imbecillity; yet in in this place I see no ground for their crimination: do they not daily hear the Heterodox party exprobrating the wars which in Catholick Countries are wag'd upon the subject of *Efficacious Grace*, and *Jansenisme*? whatsoever falls once under the press, it little imports whether it first see light here, or in any adjacent Catholick Country: Take for proofs the French *Provincial Letters*; not only vulgarly known, but render'd also into our vulgar tongue; and truly if I mistake not, the publishing such truths

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is more expedient here then in any part of the world; nothing being more importantly conducible to the reduction of our ſeparatiſts, then the diſcarding ſuperfluous controverſies, and conteſting with them only neceſſary Doctrines; without engaging for the uncertain and wavering opinions of Doctors as for the Faith deliver'd us by Chriſt and his Apoſtles. We find by experience, that great Wits, which over-rule the weaker capacities, if an aſſent be crudely requir'd from them upon the accompt of ſole Authority and command; without reaſon, either for the truth of the thing it ſelf, or at leaſt for the neceſſity of believing it, they reject it with ſcorn, and conceive thence an extream averſion: To theſe the milk of *reaſon*, that is, the conformity of Faith with inferiour Sciences, muſt, as much as is poſſible, be prepar'd; which task hath hitherto been the aim of all my endeavours. We may obſerve every day that diſputes undertaken without

without theſe grounds, are doubtful, and either depend upon the acuteneſs, and dexterity of the manager, or perhaps on pure chance; and moſt commonly conclude in wordiſh and endleſs perplexities. All which I would not have ſo underſtood as though I confeſſ'd my writings had found no acceptance or approbation in Catholick Countries, for even thence I have receiv'd not a few congratulations. In fine, what needs there more to juſtifie my printing here, then barely to ſay, I muſt perforce do it where I live and find ſupplies ſufficient for ſuch expences as are neceſſary.

They have a quarrel likewiſe with the time of my writing, in affirming, that, in this unhappy conjuncture when we are already perplext with ſeveral diſſenſions, new ones ought, by no means, to be ſet on foot. I ſhould take this reprehenſion in very good part, if they went about to compoſe thoſe other diſorders; but from the time that an attempt was made

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in *Wisbich* Castle to usurp authority over the Clergy, they have never ceas'd to contrive and practise against the known rights of our Church, nor can any sight how quick soever foresee the end of those commotions; so that these truths were now, or never to be advanced.

When all these arguments are spent in vain, at last, they cry out, that all *Hereticks* took the very same method I do, in propagating their pestilent errors; but they do not particularise in what precisely this method consists, and how farr it differs from the practise of Catholick Divines, whence 'tis most impertinent to conclude that what both *Catholicks*, and *Hereticks* indifferently do, should be ill because *Hereticks* do it. But besides, in my case, it is absolutely false. What *Heretick* ever before he began to innovate, put forth a body, or course of *Philosophy* and *Divinity*, thereby to circumscribe himself within certaind limits, and at once to declare his sence concerning all

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points of Faith? This is a quite different method from that of *Hereticks*; they go not thus to work, but fasten first upon some particular Article, and thence, by degrees, are driven, by the inevitable necessity of a bad cause, to maintaind that with the violation of others. Besides, *Hereticks* craftily pick out what the unlearned and ignorant are apt to applaud, they pursue the easiest things, making conventicles their Schools, women and Laymen their Judges, which Character whether it be more appliable to my adversaries, or me, let those judge who are best acquainted with our proceedings.

Thus much, Honoured Sir, I could not but take the liberty to say in my own behalf: Nature, and Equity requiring, that every one be presum'd good, till he be prov'd otherwise. Let my opposers then either demonstrate this my Apologie insufficient, or from henceforth cease to vent their calumnies amongst men of so great prudence and Authority.

FINIS.